

Ms Francesca Muhammad  
National Independent Education Coalition  
c/o NU Beyond  
PO Box 39266  
LONDON  
SE3 8XQ

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Dear Ms Muhammad,

Thank you for your letter to Alan Johnson of 30 April 2007 about the need for a wholly inclusive National Curriculum. As a senior official working on the review of the Secondary National Curriculum, I have been asked to reply.

In your letter you express concerns on behalf of the National Independent Education Coalition that the National Curriculum fails to embrace issues of cultural diversity and does not highlight the contribution of Black people's achievements. We want a National Curriculum which is inclusive and culturally relevant; which enables pupils from minority ethnic communities to achieve success; and which promotes participation and engagement, regardless of background or ethnicity. We know, however, that achievement is not consistent across ethnic groups and some teachers lack the confidence and the expertise to deal effectively with sensitive issues and anti-racist education - and we already have a number of strategies in place to address this.

To begin with a statutory example, we have developed an Inclusion Statement in the National Curriculum which makes it a legal requirement for teachers and schools to take specific action to respond to pupils' diverse needs. The statement outlines how teachers can modify programmes of study (legal documents setting out what must be taught in each subject) as necessary, to ensure that all pupils receive relevant and appropriately challenging work at each key stage. The statement requires teachers to follow three principles essential to developing a more inclusive curriculum – 'setting suitable learning challenges', 'responding to pupils' diverse learning needs' and 'overcoming potential barriers to learning and assessment'. National Curriculum handbooks provided to teachers give further details and examples of how these principles might be achieved in practice.

To help teachers deliver the requirements of the Inclusion Statement, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) has developed a "Respect for All" website which provides further guidance and materials for teachers on how racism can be challenged and diversity valued across the curriculum. The site was developed in consultation with the Commission for Racial Equality and Ofsted and provides advice on selection and use of resources, presenting a broad and balanced view of cultures, challenging assumptions, understanding globalisation and creating an open climate. The site is updated on an ongoing basis by examples of good practice submitted by teachers and

was recently endorsed by Sir Keith Ajegbo in his report on Diversity in the National Curriculum. It will be updated and re-launched in September 2007 as part of the secondary curriculum review, which I shall return to in a moment.

In May 2006, the Secretary of State also commissioned a review of the National Curriculum, along the lines of the research commission you have proposed in your letter. The aim of the review was to ensure that identities, cultures and values are addressed by the curriculum in a way which meets the needs of all pupils. The resulting 'Diversity and Citizenship Curriculum Report' looks at how curriculum subjects can underpin and strengthen teaching about diversity, British identities and our shared values.

You may also be aware that, from September 1<sup>st</sup> 2007, all schools will have a legislative duty to promote community cohesion. An important part of community cohesion is that the diversity of people's backgrounds and circumstances is appreciated and positively valued. We are currently drafting guidance for schools to help them to meet their new duty and are working with Sir Keith Ajegbo to ensure that his recommendations regarding school ethos and curriculum are reflected in this guidance.

I mentioned earlier that we are currently reviewing the secondary curriculum at both Key Stages 3 and 4. As a part of this review, the QCA has developed criteria to guide the redrafting of the statutory programmes of study. These explicitly state that new programmes of study for Key Stages 3 and 4 should consider the needs, interests and prior knowledge and experience of all groups, and that particular attention should be given to the needs of pupils from minority ethnic communities. QCA has been consulting widely with a range of partners and communities, including English as an Additional Language practitioners, academics and Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant managers, to ensure that the new curriculum meets the needs of these groups.

Changes to the secondary curriculum will enable teachers to tailor the curriculum to meet the particular needs of the school, its community and individual pupils. By reducing the amount of central prescription over content, we are creating time and space for teachers to rethink their delivery of teaching and learning so as to improve coherence, create a new emphasis on personal development and skills; and offer stretching opportunities for all pupils that will enable them to pursue their own interests and aptitudes. A series of curriculum 'dimensions' or 'lenses' are being developed as part of the review to encourage teachers to consider key themes across the whole of the secondary curriculum such as global citizenship, diversity and inclusion. Guidance materials and case studies will be provided to help teachers to apply these lenses when planning their own curricula.

Within individual subjects, the revised secondary curriculum will provide numerous opportunities for teachers to address issues of diversity and inclusion 'head on'. For example: within Citizenship, there is a new requirement to teach about "Identity and Diversity: Living Together in the UK";

in languages, a new flexibility is proposed over what should be taught at Key Stage 3 so that community languages as well as the working languages of the EU can be offered; within history, for the first time there will be a statutory requirement to teach about the nature and effects of the slave trade; in Geography the revised programme of study states that pupils should learn to appreciate the 'differences and similarities between people, places, environments and cultures to inform their understanding of societies and economies' – and similar statements are made about the contribution made by individuals from different times, places, cultures and ethnicity in music and dance, literature, art and design, science and even maths.

The new secondary curriculum is currently being finalised, with a view to introducing it to KS3 pupils in September 2008. In the meantime, we have commissioned the Association for Citizenship Teaching to compile a database of resources that support the teaching of diversity in the schools curriculum. We have introduced new standards for Personal Social and Health Education teachers which require them to 'recognise prejudice and have consistent strategies to deal with it'; and to 'use a range of resources sensitive to age, gender, ability, faith, sexuality, ethnicity and culture, as appropriate', and in Geography, we have part-funded the 'Crossing Continents: Connecting Communities' initiative run by the Royal Geographical Society. This programme of community partnerships, touring exhibitions, and educational work runs from 2007-2009 and aims to provide a unique insight into the world's cultures, people and places by looking at the hidden histories of African, Chinese, Muslim and Sikh people.

I hope this has reassured you that issues of diversity, inclusion and the profile of Black and ethnic minority achievements are already very high on the Department's agenda - and that they will remain so as we finalise and deliver a new secondary curriculum from September 2008.

Yours sincerely,

Angela Overington  
CURRICULUM SPECIALISM & COLLABORATION DIVISION